



## The Woman

*When you read this story strong, poignant, moving you will understand why Mr. Norton's work is appearing in America's Greatest Magazine.*

'scuffer' he, whose duty it was to assist the tired crew to sort the fish into the baskets piled forward on the boom deck and help lower them into the huge rowlock that would convey them to the shallower waters of the inner harbor. The crew of the trawling ship, sometimes grimed and hollow-eyed from loss of sleep, would then clamber stiffly up into the boat, their great sea boots clumping awkwardly, to follow their catch, pathetically intent on the price it might bring—for the crews of the trawlers save the cabin boy, work on shares.

Always the scuffer, sometimes called the "ship's housemaid," left alone, would begin his task of "tidying her up." When the catch finally reached the ancient stone pier in the inner harbor and was at last landed on the broad, worn stone pave of the fish market, it seemed ever the same, the clanging of one of the auction bells on the crowded pier, the quick, perfunctory sing song of the auctioneer, and the swift sales. For when the fleet came in and there were hundreds of lots of fish to be disposed of, time could not be wasted in sentiment or barter. What they had cost in toil, hardship or life never influenced the bid. The swarming millions in London, whether they would almost instantly depart, must have fish.

When the *Corlew* blew in and reached for her buoy there was scarcely a half-score of the fleet ahead of her, and Captain Paul's rough old face relaxed somewhat from its habitual grimace in the knowledge that his haul would be landed before the possibility of a glut and a break in price. The baskets that had been filled from the ice bunkers in the *Corlew's* hold were so heavily laden with turbot, brill, and ray-lans, all "top-price" fish, that this should prove a noteworthy catch. He had lost neither men nor gear which, inasmuch as he was not only skipper but sole owner of his craft, was most satisfactory. Captain Paul, forgetting a

INTO Brixham harbor came, like great, red-winged seabirds wearied by stress of storm-driven flights, the trawling fleet. Not so it had passed bravely out on the March ebb tide, with its two hundred and odd clean ships so closely bunched that navigation seemed impossible, but straggling, tired. Whether heavily laden or unfortunate in the week's catch, they came alike, throwing salt spray from broken waves over their trim, sharp bows. Always they did the same thing: came sweeping round the lighthouse at the head of the long breakwater and tacked, for a moment bowed graceful salute to the high, red, Devonshire cliffs that locked the harbor in, sedately moved to anchorage: and at the very last moment luffed, lost way, "doused" topsails, looses, jib, and then the huge mains' dropped sheer fifty feet into a crumpled mass to be followed shortly after by the mizzen.

Always a gray-haired and bearded man past the elasticity requisite for sea-embrance rowed out and went aboard. The

She attended no church, professed  
no faith, went her own way. But she  
had the fierce beauty of  
great masses, rough crags  
and storm-lashed seas.



# on the Beach

by ROY NORTON

who wrote "The Plunderer,"  
"The Man of Peace," etc.

Illustrations by J. D. Gleason

Thousand unprofitable voyages, storms, wrecks, and deaths, thought it a very comfortable world in which to live. He even smiled when he heard his crew of five bawling the tale of good luck across the waters to the men of the *I'll Try* who were just going ashore. And then, as his keen and discerning old eyes swept the harbor and fixed themselves on the *Murky B.*, whose skipper was his only son, the smile disappeared and gave way to perplexity, for spick and span, she presented the appearance of never having left harbor. A solitary man, perhaps her scruffer, lounged with elbows on a midship rail and smoked in a vast contemplation. Captain Paul was still frowning at her when the *Cowie* was boarded by his own scruffer who, disdaining the fact that she was still under way, climbed nimbly upward and hailed him.

"Looks like ye had a good vy ge, Captin'," the veteran called. And then, sighting the laden baskets, "My God! ather! Nothin' less nor turbit and brill and—er has done well!"

"When did my son bring the *Murky B.* in?" Captain Paul demanded.

"Er ain't bean out," the scruffer replied, with something akin to embarrassment, as if reluctant to give further information to the Hard Old Man of the fleet. "'Er's bean layin' there for—"

"Why?" Captain Paul asked, scowling at him with searching eyes that had the faculty of commanding not only obedience but cold, hard truths.

"'E's—e's—your son Bill's been gittin' married, sir," the scruffer replied, shifting uncomfortably on his feet and looking off at the tops of the high hills behind Brishauk town.

Captain Paul seemed unaware that the men of his crew had fallen to silence and were exchanging knowing glances and winks, and were intently listening. He took a step forward and laying a huge hand on the scruffer's shoulder swung him around as if

to command his attention and said, in his big gruff sea voice, "Not to that woman on the beach?"

The scruffer tried to twist loose, and then, in desperation, replied, "Yes, sir, to that girl Minnie—the one you

calls the Woman on the Beach. For God's sake, let go my shoulder, skipper! I had nothin' to do with it. It's 'er's and Captin' Bill's affair, not mine!"

The men watching saw Captain Paul's hand release its hold, and the bearer of bad news rubbed his shoulder as if to restore circulation after the talonlike clutch of hard fingers; they saw the big hands clench as if in agony, and the great shoulders droop. They saw the rugged head bend forward and the keen eyes grow tired and old as they looked abstractedly out to the broad expanse of sea, as if musingly seeking therefrom some reason why this blow had been inflicted. For a long time he stood thus, motionless, huge and yet conveying the quality of mortal wounds, of weariness of soul, of failure. The cabin boy, moving uneasily, stepped backward, slipped over a fish basket and fell. No one laughed, but the sound seemed to bring the standing figure back to life and its necessities.

"What are you all standin' about for?" Captain Paul roared, jerking his head upward and eyeing them. "Are we in port, or aren't we? Have we got fish aboard, or haven't we? Do we trawl 'em up to sell, or to look at? Then why not get 'em off?"

But as they fell to work in frenzied haste they saw him turn away, hesitate, take another hard look at the *Marthy B.* and then drop heavily downward through the companionway that swallowed him from sight.

Down in the cabin aft, Captain Paul sat with his head pillowed on his arms that were outflung across the narrow table. He did not hear the clumping of sea boots or the slipping of heavily laden baskets on the deck above his head. No bump of the landing boat alongside, as the slow waves thrust it against the hull, was audible to him.

All that he could think of was this tragedy of hope, this end of great dreams, this death of future. He recalled the glories of that dawn when a woman whom he had loved as only men of his kind can love, had lifted wearied eyes to his as he took into his trembling hands the woolen blankets that held his first and only born. He remembered how, when she had died, he had held the hand of that toddling boy in his white clods fell on a mother's grave, and that it seemed to him that but for the clasp of that trusting hand his heart would burst with grief, and he could welcome the depths of the sea on which he had always lived. Always there had been the hands—the grasp of which is the most important factor in one's fate.

The past swept over him without cohesion or sequence, but not without detail. His affection for the boy; his insistence that he should at least go through a common school; his pride over the teacher's regular reports; the time when the lad won a medal at a swimming match; the day when he first took him to sea and began those instructions which every boy in Brixham must learn before he can become master man or skipper of a ship; the day when Bill got a ship of his own through his father's recommendation; and the pride in his son's first great success. And then—the first black days! Ugly whispers behind his back! Conversations that abruptly halted when he appeared. The first bleak knowledge of the woman he had called "the Woman on the Beach!"

Captain Paul, with hard toil-worn fingers, clutched and writhing, tried to review all that he knew of her, and to be just. To be fair had always been his ideal. Men said that of him. Men honored him because of that unhesitant virtue, even though they frequently referred to him as a "hide-bound old Puritan." For him no woman in scarlet had ever had the slightest attraction, nor had he ever tolerated men or youths who could thus be beguiled. He summed up the sorry score against the woman called Minnie. She had come to the fishing village where the vast majority of residents, having lived by the sea, on the sea, and sprung from the line of greatest seamen the world has ever known, were simple, direct, clean. Her past was unknown. She had no known husband, but—she gave birth to a child. Its span was brief. She attended no church, professed no faith, defied and drove forth those who sought to minister to her spiritual welfare, and went her own way. She had the fierce beauty of great moors, rough crags and storm-lashed seas; hence there were many who sought her. She braided trawl nets faster than anyone along that entire sweep of beach where so many had gained rapidity and deftness by long practice. But her scorn and defiance of all that rigid convention which binds and holds those who live by the trawls brought her into disrepute. And an angel, let alone the mother of a fatherless child, could scarcely have maintained an unsmirched reputation in such an environment after the evil bearers of bad rumor had begun their charge in full cry.

They called her "Minnie"—in Brixham town. Not "Mrs. This," or "Mrs. That." Just "Minnie." There was a sinister significance in the familiarity of appellation. And it was to her—this—thought Captain Paul, that his only son, the secret pride of his heart, had been married! His boy—married to the Woman on the Beach!

Resting there in the cabin, with his head on his arms, and suffering savage wounds of humiliation and disappointment, he had not heard the insistent thumping of the butt end of an oar on the deck above his head; but now he could not evade the scruffer's aged and querulous voice that shouted down the companionway, "Capting Paul! Capting Paul! Be ye goin' ashore? The catch is off and if ye'd be at the market, ye should—"

"Coming! Hold hard!" he cried, lifting his white head and then, ponderously, his great body and standing to his feet. He stood for an instant clinging to the edge of the cabin table,

steadying himself to face his fellow men. His face when it appeared as if framed in the deck combings, was set, hard, and unperturbed. The scruffer, who had been intently waiting, might as well have sought signs of emotion from granite hills.

"Hold fast, lads. The skipper's comin' aboard," he said, and made way.

Captain Paul stepped over unflinching, and standing below in the rocking boat, with a hand clutching the ship's strake, said to the scruffer, "Joe, keep a weather eye on that galley stove. Some of the brick is cracked and if them coals was to fall through, you might have a fire."

He sat down upon a thwart, his weight appreciably adding to the boat's lack of trim, shifted to better it, and said, "Lay into it, boys. The market's not out here. It's over there—on the pier. What's the good of fish that ain't sold? Lay into it. Let's get across!"

It was not until his boat was approaching the ancient stone market pier and nearing the landing steps that he looked upward and scanned the crowd that bordered its edge. For a single instant Captain Paul's weatherbeaten old face flushed, his eyebrows twitched, and then he was again as unemotional in appearance as a bronze mask. That momentary break was caused by the sight of a stalwart, handsome man dressed in his "Sunday clothes," his son Bill, who waited for him at the head of the slippery stone landing steps that had been hollowed through centuries by fishermen's trudging feet.

Those nearest Captain Bill instinctively gave way that he might greet his father. It was the immemorial custom that the head of the steps belonged to those, be they men or women, who met their own men folk returning from the sea. Sometimes, after great disasters, the market bells had been hushed and women and children thronged therein, sobbing, hoping until the last going meekly and slowly away with covered heads when hope was done. Theirs was palpable tragedy, but it was scarcely greater than that which was hidden in Captain Paul's heart as he climbed upward to face his son.

"Captain," said the younger man hastily, stepping forward with outstretched hand, and then at the sight of the grim old face—"Dad, I've—"

Captain Paul halted and fixed him with steady, unyielding eyes, disregarding the hand that was still held toward him.

The trawlermen nearest stopped talking and stared. One or two surreptitiously nudged each other. A waiting silence, tense and expectant, seemed to have settled over that part of the pier. Neither Captain Paul nor his son seemed aware of it for they were standing in the entrance of portentous gates that must irrevocably open or shut forever.

"William," said the elder man, in his big sea voice that could not be softened so but those nearby could hear its cold pitch of inflexibility, "is what the scruffer told me true? That ye are married?"

"Yes, father, I was married four days gone by."

"And to—" Captain Paul asked, still unyielding.

"To Minnie Hurd."

Quite deliberately Captain Paul thrust both hands into his pockets; his clear eyes were as hard as gray glass, as unfeeling as steel.

"And so," he said, slowly and distinctly, "it's all true. You've married that Woman on the Beach. And—by the God above you!—from this moment you're no son of mine!"

Appalled by his vehemence, those within hearing gasped, and his son drew back as if lashed across the soul with a thonged whip. His hands impulsively clenched, his face went white, and one aged trawlerman hastily edged closer as if to prevent the final outrage of a blow. Then the younger man's hands unclenched and he held them out, gulped and said, "Dad—don't—please don't—"

"Out of my way!" gruffly commanded Captain Paul, and brushed past. He thrust anyone who impeded his progress aside, and for the first time in years trudged steadily away from the market before his catch was sold.

In the midst of it, alone, being watched, but as much apart as if he were on a desert island, stood Captain Bill, his big arms hanging limply and helplessly by his sides, his head bent forward until his square chin rested on his chest, and his eyes dimmed with bitter hurt. The prodigious and simple superstitions of those men of the seas, the innate and inherited religion that underlies them all, exaggerated the terror and tragedy of a father's curse into something of appalling magnitude. They shook sorrowful heads. One or two quietly crossed themselves. They seemed momentarily paralyzed, these men of bodily action, into stone-like immobility. And then that aged veteran of the seas whose



"And so," said the father distinctly, "you're married that Woman on the Beach. From this moment you're an son of mine!"

kindly face quivered with emotion and sympathy, laid a hand upon the stalwart, drooping shoulder beside him and said, "William, thee must aye forgive him. He be thy fayther, lad, and is sore hurt. He meant naught. It were because he was so suddint and powerful upset. He were on beam ends, lad, in a heavy sea, and by now is sorrier than sorrow herself for what he said and didn't mean."

Other rough hands reached out and patted him on back and shoulder. A chorus of sympathetic expressions beat round his ears. He tried to speak and could not, and then almost blindly

pushed his way through the crowd, going back to her whom his father had publicly called "the Woman on the Beach."

Whatever her past, bad or good, reckless, wilful or unfortunate, it became an admitted conviction, in due time, that the Woman on the Beach proved a perfect sailorman's wife. Furthermore, it became the firm conviction of every one save Captain Paul that she had never earned or merited his harsh appellation, his inflexible and unyielding contempt. Hard and grim as he had always been, a further armor seemed added to him. More and more he came and went, alone, somewhat shunned in the land

and sea locked community of superstition, as the father who had cursed his own son. Behind his back his fellows ever shook doubtful and disturbed heads, waiting for the blight of God to fall upon him. He must have felt that growing alcoholism that spread round him, enveloping him even as one of his own great trawls enmeshed the fish in the depths of the seas. But, if so, he gave no sign. Of one thing he could be sure: if the *Marilyn B.* came to port ahead of the *Curlie*, there would always be standing at the head of the worn stone steps of the boat landing, a stalwart young man who voicelessly, mutely, imploringly sought his eyes. And that man, his only son, was the sole one to whom he never spoke, whom his glance merely brushed and passed over.

The immutable seasons came and went, stormy winds of spring passing to summer's calm when trawlers whistled for

a breeze, verging into autumn's fitful discontent when sheets must be smartly hauled, thence to winter's turbulent malevolence when decks were awash with icy waves and harps blew as they hauled at canvas or at net. Spring came again. The tiny orchards up on the high rough hills overlooking the bay were in blossom, and grass and turf were green on a day when the *Curlie* again blew in. The *Marilyn B.*, of which Captain Hill, having saved and prospered, was now part owner, lay at her moorings. The *Curlie's* boat came to the landing steps with Captain Paul, gray-bearded, gray-haired, gray-eyebrowed, standing erect with the seaman's poise as he had stood on land ting a thousand times before. Long before this the men of the fleet had become habituated to the peculiarity of his relations with his son, so that now none was interested in what might take place.

Captain Paul bluff imperturbable, clumped heavily upward in his big sea boots, saw his son, brushed bent with his eyes and would have passed as usual but for the fact that his way was unexpectedly blocked. They stood there, father and son confronting each other the elder man suddenly drawing back into his self-imposed and armored shell, the younger man hungrily intent, crying for the old love and sympathy.

"Dad," he cried scarcely above a whisper, as if to prevent any idle listener from hearing. "I've waited in port for two days to tell you something. I want you to know. It didn't seem right that anyone but I should tell you. I've—I've got a boy of my own. It doesn't matter what you thought or what you then said, but—Dad—I want your hand in mine, now. Won't you take it and come and see the boy?"

It was the last appeal he was ever to make. He wavered, and none but God can know how poignant was the cry from his heart. For an instant Captain Paul hesitated, then from determination staved its nobler impulse. The hand withdrew itself into the pocket behind the square frontal flap of his blue sea trousers and as if he had neither heard nor paused, Captain Paul passed on.

It was the final hurt to one who as a boy had adored and loved him, and as a man had come to prize when in his strength he would have paid to no other being on earth. Always thereafter though the *Marilyn B.* came first to port, no one waited for Captain Paul at the landing head.

Perhaps Captain Paul missed the sight of that imposing incense, the willing hand, the welcome to port. But if so, his demerol was unrequited. Always, as before, as his forbear for long generations had done, he came and went, stodgily, intent on the market alone. The catch was landed, the bell rang, the auctioneer droned his song, the fish were sold, the buyer bent over and panned his printed tag, and—the results of another voyage were culminated.

Once, in the narrow winding street with its gabled houses and moss covered roofs, he paused to stare at a boy. A sturdy little chap, this, with fearless, inquiring and honest eyes that were unabashed when Captain Paul, remembering long forgotten things, impulsively patted and caressed a tooned head.

"You're a fine lad. If you keep on growin' you'll live to be a fine sailorman," said Captain Paul admiringly. "What's your name?"



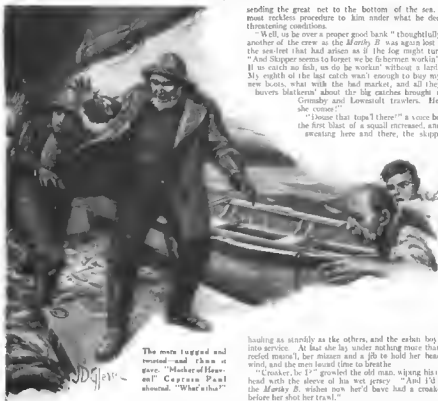
"Paul," said the boy. "You see, I'm named after my grandfather. He skips his own boat, he do. My dad says he's the finest sailor in the world."

"Paul? Paul what?"

"Paul Hurd Norcott. Hurd don't really belong because that was my mother's name. What's your name?"

And the boy could not understand why, and was momentarily hurt, when the white-headed old man with the roll of the seas in his legs suddenly turned and walked away. Even adamant can melt. High and stern cliffs must yield to the persistent battering of a sea. Each resists to the very last.

It was in a morning of tempestuous March when the trawler fleet jostled out of the harbor on a high tide. Nearly two hundred vessels there were with red and numbered mains creaking



The men tugged and twisted—and then it gave. "Mackerel Heaven!" Captain Paul shouted. "What's this?"

soft, with mizzens taut and jibs beiled, with black and tackle whining, all behaving as if glad to be away in quest of those grounds where swells run deep and each has combat or adventure of its own.

Down the channel the *Curlew* flew, carrying all sail and showing her heels to all the fleet save one, the *Marthy B*.

"Aye, him be a proper good 'un, that Skipper Bill," one of the men exclaimed admiringly. "A sailorman, if e'er there be one afloat. Her be carrying as much cloth as us be, and her do have a proper bone in her teeth!"

Captain Paul, standing alone with his hands in his pockets, smoking his aged blackened pipe, tried to overcome a sneaking pride in that son of his whom he had instructed in seamanship from the time the baby hands could clutch a tiller. And at last, when the *Marthy B* could not be shaken off, he went below as if to shut out her sight. All day she hung on, and when night came her lights were visible as if the son's eyes were fixed reproachfully on his father's ship ahead.

When morning came the weather was ominously threatening. Bands of wind torn fog shot athwart the sea, sometimes enveloping the *Curlew* like an impalpable shroud. As oily swell beat inward from the open Atlantic which was not many leagues away.

"Her be smoochy," said the ancient mariner, looking uneasily around and sniffing the air with uneasy nostrils. "Us'll have heavy weather before night. Us'll find bloody squalls."

"Croaker!" the cabin boy derided and then dove nimbly for the galley stairs to avoid a flying rope end.

The fog lifted an instant, disclosing off in the distance the *Marthy B*.

"Lord love us! Her be gon' to shoot her trawl!" exclaimed the old man, his attention distracted from pursuit of the boy. To "shoot her trawl," the fisherman's term for

sending the great net to the bottom of the sea, seemed a most reckless procedure to him under what he deemed such threatening conditions.

"Well, us be over a proper good bank," thoughtfully observed another of the crew as the *Marthy B* was again lost to sight in the sea-fret that had arisen as if the fog might turn to rain.

"And Skipper seems to forget we be fishermen workin' on shares. If us catch no fish, us do be workin' without a farthing of pay. My eighth of the last catch wasn't enough to buy my two kids new boots, what with the bad market, and all they Lounding buyers blatherin' about the big catches brought in by they Gromsby and Lowestoft trawlers. Hello! Here she comes!"

"Douse that topal there!" a voice bellowed, as the first blast of a squall increased, and men ran sweating here and there, the skipper himself

hauling as steadily as the others, and the cabin boy impressed into service. At last she lay under nothing more than a double reefed mainsail, her mizen and a jib to hold her head into the wind, and the men found time to breathe.

"Croaker, be it!" growled the old man, wiping his lamp forehead with the sleeve of his wet jersey. "And I'd be bettin' the *Marthy B* wishes now her'd have had a croaker aboard, before her shot her trawl."

"Aye, old us! Her may have lost 'er gear, I do be thinkin'," asserted the man nearest him. And then after a moment added, "Poor bloke! It do be larnsome hard luck to lose a trawl gear what be wuth more as eighty quid in these times. Poor bloke!"

The storm climbed upward to its very apex, in which every stay and piece of rigging whined and thrummed in the wind. Then, less quickly than it came, it died away, leaving but a good "pulling wind." Again Captain Paul bellowed orders, the huge red mainsail creaked upward, and the *Curlew* shot her trawl. Let go by a stopper in the light of the bridle, it went overboard with a great splash, the warp paid out lathum by lathum seeking the sea bed seventy feet below, and with the annering, incredibly astute knowledge possessed by trawlermen, requiring no hydrographic charts, the *Curlew* was headed back across the banks.

"Us now be just about where us last see the *Marthy B*," the grandfather of the ship opined, "but I reckon 'er must 'a' had to run before the wind and maybe 'er be lorry mile off by now."

What further comments he might have made were interrupted by Captain Paul, who began giving orders. The *Curlew* spilled the wind from her sails, and the winch was manned to drag the trawl aboard. The heavy beam and its steel heads emerged from the sea and was laboriously hoisted in board. The great trawl was hauled inward until the becket could be put around the bight of the net and hooked on to the big rope halyards. The block at the masthead, full forty feet above, whined and creaked as the huge, black, dripping mass was hoisted painfully upward until the end containing the catch hung suspended like an enormous black bag above the deck. It swayed slightly with the roll of the sea.

"My word! Us have got a proper catch this time, from the weight of 'er," panted the ancient one, as the "second band"

seized the "cod-line end," the rope which bound the smaller end of the trawl, and which, when released, would allow its contents to deluge forth.

The mate tugged and twisted, and then it gave. A great shower of glittering, wriggling, struggling fish nearly swept him from his feet, and then they heard Captain Paul's shout.

"Mother of Heaven!" he exclaimed. "What's this?"

They ran forward, heedless of the fish that still vainly flapped, and expired round their sea boots and looked down, silently, upon something else that lay drenched and quiet on deck. It was the body of a man, face downward, huddled, in seaman's garb.

Captain Paul's hand reached out, gingerly, and turned it over. And then as if all physical power were lost he fell to his knees, staring into the dead face of his only son. His crew bent forward behind him, horrified, stupefied into that immobility which nothing but unanticipated tragedy can bring.

For a long time not a sound was audible to their ears, accustomed and habituated as they were to the gentle or bleak winds and the surge of the sea against their oaken hulls. And then, for the first time in all the long years they had known him, they heard from the distorted lips of Captain Paul a single, heart-broken moan. His hard hands trembled now as they sought and caressed the white and quiet face.

"Billy! Billy—my boy!" he cried as if to awaken from slumber that inert form, and all his heartbreak sounded tremulously clear in that suspense. He lifted a haggard face and looked about him with eyes that seemed to mirror the utmost depths of grief, stared as if unrecognizing at those around him, and then slowly and tenderly thrust his fingers beneath the body and gently lifted it upward, clutching it to his heart.

"My son has come aboard," he said. "I can't carry him alone. Won't one of you lend a hand to help me get him below?"

The spell was broken. One of the crew suddenly threw off his tarpaulin, slumped to his knees and with bent and bared head began whispering prayers for the dead, crossing himself devoutly through respect for his faith. The cabin boy, speechless, took two or three steps, shrinking backward. The ancient mariner bent over and caught the lifeless legs and feet; but as they carried their burden below it was Captain Paul who, dry-eyed, voiceless, still held the inert head to his breast.

Captain Paul, alone, for a long time knelt beside the still form that rested on his cabin berth. Almost with apathy he discerned and scrutinized the chafed and scarred leather over the ankle of a sea boot that told its tale, that bore mute witness how the bight of a bridle had enlooped his son's foot as the heavy trawl was shot into the sea and carried him, helplessly entrapped, many fathoms down, and held him there until kindly death had ended even the last despair.

"Billy! Billy Boy! Can ye hear me now?" he muttered, bending over the upturned face and staring yearningly into the dead and open eyes that for the first time in all his knowledge of them did not gleam response to his own. "Somewhere ye must! You're somewhere, Billy, and through the kindness of God Almighty ye must know what I have to say!"

And then, in broken, incoherent whispers, or in words sometimes not uttered at all but formulated in his thought, he confessed all that was in the soul of him; admission of unfounded prejudices, injuries to pride, unwarranted stubbornness, useless determinations—all that had come too late.

Too late? Who knows how the living voice carries beyond the veil that divides us from immortality? To Captain Paul came the conviction that his words had been heard, understood and weighed. And that all the old love had survived and in the greater understanding pity and forgiveness had cleansed the blots from the long smirched page.

The face of his dead son appeared to take on the gentle and benignant cast of consummate peace and rest. The lips, somehow, lost the distortion of terror and death, and the dead mouth gently smiled. Searching deeply, he saw in the depths of the glazed eyes a clear and serene fire, undiscernible save for him. He was again aware of sounds above, and outside—the rhythmical beating of the waves upon the hull, the occasional clump of a booted foot upon the deck. He forced himself to meet the requirements and immediate demands of the present. He turned from the body on the berth, and sat on the edge of the table, with folded arms and bent head, considering.

He, as well as any man on earth, knew that no trawler can come to port with a drowned corpse aboard, though her catch be beyond the records of all time, and dispose of her cargo. Even the hardened buyers of the callous outer world will voice no bid, and stand hushed, repulsed by the thought that this

quiet, inoffensive thing laid upon the shore was brought up in the unfeeling trawl, together with the fish that were offered to feed a waiting world. He knew that on the deck above was no man who did not depend upon the catch and the market to meagerly and hardly support his own. Sharemen these, one and all save the cabin boy. He wished to make the final amend to love and memory, but it could not be done lest he do injustice to those dependent upon his leadership and skill.

"Billy," he said, again moving across the narrow space. "I'd like to have carried ye back to land, lad, where I could plant flowers of remembrance and love to wave greenly above ye in the spring winds, and to where, when I can no longer go to sea, I could come and talk to ye, hoping your ears might hear and know all the words that I—fool that I am—left so long unsaid. But it can't be. It ain't fair to them up there on the deck. And so, lad, I'm sendin' you back to sea again, on the last voyage you can ever make."

White-faced, grim, but displaying no sign of emotion, he climbed the companion-steps and faced his men. His voice was as steady as ever when he spoke.

"One of ye bring a spare sheet of sail from the lazarette, and a couple more of ye loosen a spare trawl head. My son Billy is goin' out to sea."

Awed by his terrible immobility they obeyed, speaking only when speech could not be avoided, and then in but a muttered terseness. He was still standing on the fore'deck, motionless, leaning with his arm on the black bulwarks, and gazing into the sea when they carried their burden upward. He said nothing as he looked down for a long time in that waiting silence, and then made a significant gesture. The men of his crew bent to their task, and still waited for his command.

After a time he put out a trembling, caressing hand whose hard fingers rested for a moment on the canvas, patted it as if again comforting and reassuring the warm body of a trembling boy, and they heard him murmur, as if his words were not for their ears, but something secret, sacred, inviolate and intended for another's alone, his farewell.

"Billy, my son, God speed ye, and care for ye better than I have ever done. God rest ye! Good by!"

He straightened up, looked at sea and sky, but never at them, and then as he trudged toward the companionway said over his shoulder, "Heave!" There was a single splash, an almost inaudible gurgling as the waters closed over their own, and then, after a moment more, the mate gestured a command to replace the bulwark slip. It slid forward. The deck was again secure, clean, moist, as if once more ready for the sea. From the companionway hatch they heard a voice ordering, "Get sail on again, lads, and for an hour make nor' nor-east. Then stand by to shoot the trawl."

Into Brixham harbor came, like great red-winged sea-birds wearied by stress of storm-driven flights, the trawling fleet. Not as it has passed bravely out on the March ebbtide with its two hundred and odd clean ships closely bunched, but straggling, tired, disreputable.

The *Curlew's* scruffer pulled alongside.

"Has the *Marthy B.* come in yet?" Captain Paul asked him.

"No, her bean't in yet; but there her be, just nosin' in off Berry Head, sir."

Captain Paul, to the scruffer's infinite surprise, said, "Then before ye begin to unload the catch put me ashore." He swung a great sea boot over the bulwark and then, as he stood balancing on the strake preparatory to dropping into the rowboat alongside, paused and eyed the men of his crew who stood agape as if astonished into inaction, and said, "Ye'll have to look after the catch this time, lads, without me. I must go over and break the bad news gently as I can to—"

He paused, his lips twitched as if he had almost uttered the old habitual term of contempt—"To my daughter Minnie and my grandson. They'll be needin' me now and—by the God above us!—they shall have all I can do or give from now on as long as I live."

His eyes swept over them as if challenging anyone to make any comment whatever, then he dropped into the stern of the boat that rose and fell by the side of the black hull, and was rowed away. As he sat huge, motionless, his broad shoulders squared, his white head stiffly held, he did not look back, for his eyes were fixed with miserable longing and sad sympathy on a tiny white cottage up on the hillside where dwelt she whom he had so long called the Woman on the Beach.

In its flower-clad veranda stood a white figure that was eagerly waving a white cloth and waiting for a return signal that could never again come from the inbound *Marthy B.*